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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 004190

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [TU](#) [LE](#) [SY](#)

SUBJECT: TURKEY/LEBANON

(U) Classified by CDA Nancy McEldowney, E.O. 12958, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

1. (S) Summary: In the wake of PM Erdogan's June visit to Lebanon, the first by a Turkish PM in 50 years, Turkish MFA and Lebanese embassy spin relations as excellent. MFA and embassy contacts claim Erdogan pressed democratization and implementation of UNSCR 1559 during the visit, and urged leaders to form a government. They also assert Erdogan pressed for disarmament of Hizbullah, but he failed to deliver a crisp public message on that point during the trip. The MFA believes Syrian intelligence elements remain in Lebanon and says it considers this unacceptable. End summary.

#### June Erdogan Visit

2. (U) PM Erdogan's June 15-16 visit to Lebanon was the first by a Turkish PM in 50 years. Erdogan's interlocutors included President Lahoud, Parliament Speaker Berri, and caretaker PM Mikati.

3. (C) Both Turkish MFA Middle East Department Head Bozay and Lebanese DCM Samad described Erdogan's June visit to Lebanon as focused mostly on economic matters, Bozay saying Turkey believes economic prosperity in Lebanon will strengthen democratic values. Erdogan's Beirut visit included attending the Arab Economic Forum and giving the keynote address at the Lebanese/Turkish Business Council meeting.

4. (C) Bozay and Samad tried to stress that Erdogan also pressed democratization and implementation of UNSCR 1559 during his visit, urged Lebanese leaders not delay in forming a government, and denounced the Rafik Hariri murder. According to Bozay, Turkey hopes to see Hariri's son Sa'ad gain strength; Bozay told us Erdogan "personally" instructed the MFA to draft only one congratulatory letter after the election -- to Sa'ad.

5. (C) Samad claimed that Erdogan also "relayed the U.S. vision for the Middle East" to Lebanese leaders, including President Lahoud. Samad noted pointedly that Erdogan's Lebanon visit came just days after his meeting with President Bush.

6. (C) Samad termed current Turkish-Lebanese relations "excellent." Economic relations are improving. According to Samad, Erdogan is "well-respected and listened to" in Lebanon. Samad said "we cannot forget what he said last year (referring to Erdogan's statements calling Israeli treatment of Palestinians 'state terror') and how he boycotted visits and pressed Israel."

#### MFA Believes Syrian Intelligence Still Present In Lebanon

7. (S) The Turkish MFA is convinced Syrian intelligence elements remain in Lebanon. Bozay's assessment to us is that some Syrian intelligence personnel left but were replaced by new personnel; he called this unacceptable. He also told us he has seen reports Syrian intelligence personnel are "coming and going" in Lebanon. However, he conceded that Turkey "does not have strong intelligence" in Lebanon.

#### Hizbullah

8. (C) Both Samad and Bozay claimed Erdogan pressed for disarmament of Hizbullah during his visit. However, when the subject came up during his press conference with Lebanese PM Mikati, Erdogan went off on a tangent, complaining about terrorism in Turkey, and concluding that "the best thing is for each country to decide what is most suitable to safeguard its security and stability." According to Bozay, Erdogan's statement was intended to emphasize the difficulty of disarming Hizbullah.

9. (C) According to Bozay, Turkey hopes Hizbullah moves toward political participation, which will move them away from violence. However, he said Turkey does "not know Hizbullah's intentions." Bozay said Turkey "has no official contacts" with Hizbullah, saying this is "taboo." Samad also doubts Turkey has contact with Hizbullah.

#### Lebanese Diplomat Views Turkish/Syrian Relations

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110. (C) Samad scoffed at the notion that Bashar Asad is a would-be reformer, a view widespread in the GOT and Turkish bureaucracy. However, he professes to believe Damascus listens to Turkey and that good Turkish/Syrian relations will benefit Lebanon -- if Turkey presses Syria not to interfere in Lebanon.  
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